

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

COMMISSION ADVISORY
AND COMPLIANCE DIVISION
Energy Branch

RESOLUTION E-3217
March 13, 1991

R E S O L U T I O N

RESOLUTION E-3217 - REQUEST BY PACIFIC BELL
TO PROVIDE TELEPHONE SERVICE IN THE VICINITY
OF CAMP SACRAMENTO, EL DORADO COUNTY VIA AN
OVERHEAD CROSSING OF SCENIC HIGHWAY 50,
DEVIATING FROM UNDERGROUNDING POLICY.

REQUEST BY LETTER FROM PACIFIC BELL, DATED
NOVEMBER 8, 1990, FOR JAMES BITTNER, CUSTOMER.

SUMMARY

1. Pacific Bell (PacBell) proposes to provide telephone service to James Bittner (Customer), a lessee of the United States Forest Service (USFS) near Camp Sacramento in El Dorado County. As proposed, the extension would cross over U. S. Highway 50 (a state scenic highway) at the USFS Sayles Canyon Tract. The overhead crossing would be placed on existing Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) poles, under a joint pole agreement.
2. The impact and visibility of the proposed overhead crossing will be negligible, while the alternative of an underground installation would have significant negative environmental impact and prohibitive cost.
3. This Resolution grants PacBell's request.

BACKGROUND

1. State policy would bury telecommunication facilities near scenic highways when feasible and consistent with sound environmental planning (Public Utilities Code Section 320). This Commission is designated as the State's agency for implementing the policy.

NOTICE

1. The applicable governmental authorities in this case are the U.S.F.S., the California Department of Transportation, The El Dorado County Community Development Department (Planning Division) and the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors. All of these agencies have been notified of this request in accordance with the provisions of G.O. 96-A and all have had the opportunity to respond.

2. On November 16, 1990, the U.S.F.S. sent a letter to PacBell supporting the overhead crossing and recommending that the request for a deviation from Section 320 of the Code be approved. In the same letter, U.S.F.S. denied authorization for PacBell to place cables underground on Forest Service land.

PROTESTS

1. No protests to PacBell's letter have been received.

DISCUSSION

1. PacBell's proposed project traverses rugged, mountainous terrain and the American River. Exposed, solid rock is a common feature. The existing overhead route of PG&E's electric lines is the most direct path across this area. PG&E's lines cross Highway 50 at a location where the highway cuts into the hillside.

2. Because of the terrain, an underground route would necessarily follow a different path than PG&E's overhead route. The overhead crossing would extend for 435 feet as opposed to 1,500 feet for an underground cable. Potential future customer growth in this immediate area is considered to be negligible.

3. The least damaging underground alternative assumes a successful bore under the American River. In the event that such a bore is not possible, burial would require the construction and removal of a dam and a diversion canal in order to trench under the river bed. The underground route would also require extensive environmental and archeological studies, and could possibly cause ecological damage to the river.

4. The U.S.F.S., besides opposing undergrounding and recommending the overhead route as a deviation from the State's underground policy, also considers the proposed crossing to represent negligible visual impact.

5. The estimated cost of an overhead crossing on PG&E's existing poles is approximately \$2,000. Estimated construction cost of the underground alternative is \$89,600. This represents a cost ratio of 45 to 1 between underground and overhead. If a temporary dam and diversion canal is required, the cost goes up by an additional \$15,000 and the cost ratio becomes 52 to 1.

6. The Commission Advisory and Compliance Division (CACD) has reviewed this matter and conducted a field investigation of the proposed job site. CACD concludes that the request for a deviation from Section 320 of the Public Utilities Code is reasonable and recommends that the request be granted.

FINDINGS

1. PacBell has received a request from the Customer for telephone service. A crossing of Highway 50 will be required to provide service.
2. The overhead crossing of Highway 50 with new telephone cable would have negligible visual impact on the scenic highway because it would be placed on an existing PG&E overhead crossing.
3. The potential for ecological damage to the river and the surrounding area exists in the event of an underground crossing.
4. Applicable governmental agencies have had the opportunity to comment on this project and did not object. The United States Forest Service recommends the overhead line and has denied PacBell authorization to excavate on U.S.F.S. land in order to install underground cables.
5. If the Commission denied this request for a deviation from Section 320, the conflict between the Commission's order to place the line underground and the U.S.F.S.'s denial to excavate would result in telephone service being denied to this customer.
6. Section 320 stipulates that undergrounding will take place "whenever feasible". A cost ratio of approximately 50 to 1 between underground and overhead facilities, caused by the terrain, demonstrates an infeasible condition.
7. This deviation, if granted, would apply only to this specific case and in no way should be construed as a precedent or a blanket endorsement for deviations in similar cases. Any further requests for deviations will have to be considered on a case by case basis.
8. PacBell's request for a deviation from the requirements for undergrounding is consistent with sound environmental planning and should be granted.

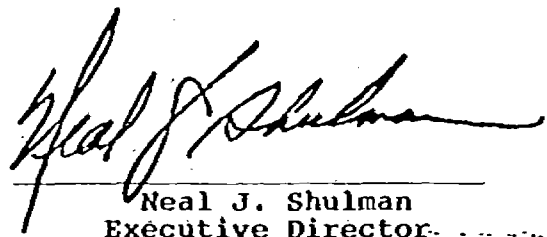
THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that:

1. Authority is granted for Pacific Bell to deviate from the undergrounding provisions of Section 320 of the Public Utilities Code in order to provide telephone service to James Bittner at Camp Sacramento via one new overhead crossing of the scenic corridor of Highway 50 in El Dorado County on existing Pacific Gas & Electric Company facilities. This authority is granted in accordance with the procedures outlined in Commission Decision 80864, dated December 19, 1972, in Case 9364.

2. This Resolution is effective today.

I hereby certify that this Resolution was adopted by the Public Utilities Commission at its regular meeting on March 13, 1991. The following Commissioners approved it:

PATRICIA M. ECKERT
President
G. MITCHELL WILK
JOHN B. OHANIAN
DANIEL WM. FESSLER
NORMAN D. SHUMWAY
Commissioners


Neal J. Shulman
Executive Director